

Director of the Foreign Service Institute

Department of State

to the Subcommittee on Postsecondary Education,

House Committee on Education and Labor

Thursday, June 11, 1981

Mr. Chairman, I welcome this opportunity to speak about foreign language training and its importance to the achievement of U.S. policy goals throughout the world. You personally are playing a vital role in bringing this issue to the attention of the nation through your writing and other initiatives, including these hearings.

The U.S. Foreign Service has a variety of difficult jobs to carry out overseas. Political officers need a deep understanding of the currents that are moving in the host country's society. Commercial officers should seek every opportunity to promote demand for U.S. products. Military attaches must be intimately familiar with the operational effectiveness as well as the political mood of the local military. Public affairs officers need to be persuasive in presenting American policies and accomplishments to the audiences they meet. The skill that all these officers need if they are to do their job effectively is the ability to communicate with the people with whom they deal. In the vast majority of embassies and consulates, this means doing so in a foreign language.

overseas assignments, I have seen how the performance of our diplomats is directly related to their capability in using the local language. I would make the same observation about Americans who represent the private sector abroad.

I agree with you, Mr. Chairman, that the American educational system has not done an adequate job in preparing our citizens to work with foreign languages abroad either in government or in business. Even among those students oriented toward careers in foreign affairs, language competence is limited. Over the last 20 years the percentage of new Foreign Service officer candidates with a professional level of competence in a foreign language has averaged about 25 percent. This limited base has put a heavy responsibility on the Foreign Service Institute to provide the necessary training and imposed a significant additional cost on the Department. It takes \$10,000 in instructional cost to train a U.S. Government employee for 44 weeks in an intensive language course at FSI -- plus the employee's salary during training, which is also a personnel cost.

I believe that FSI has a solid record of accomplishment in language training and that we are on the way to improving that record. Out of a total of 3,681 Foreign Service Officers, 2,820 have a professional level of competence in at least one language (in other words about 77 percent). Of these, 911 have such competence in two languages; 263 in three; 81 in

Before a junior Foreign Service Officer can receive career tenure, he must now achieve professional competence in at least one language.

To encourage candidates with language backgrounds to apply for the Foreign Service, new members of the Service who bring professional level competence with them receive additional pay. In addition, officers in Service who can speak languages for which there is a critical requirement, receive pay incentives when they achieve certain levels of proficiency. The Foreign Service Act of 1980 improves these incentives, which in some cases will reach 15 percent of base pay. The Department is also at work to implement Section 2207 of the Foreign Service Act, which provides for the designation of model foreign language competence posts. At our posts in the field nearly 5,000 U.S. Government employees are studying local languages on a part-time basis.

As I said earlier, I believe this record is a good one, but more needs to be done and we have made progress in that direction. At FSI we are working both to improve the quality of language training and to provide it to more U.S. employees. We have undertaken a successful effort to integrate more effectively the language studies of FSI students with an improved curriculum in area studies. Our aim is to provide U.S. Government employees going abroad with the linguistic as well as substantive tools to do their jobs.

specific job needs to our full-length language courses, which range in length from 5 months to two years. This is being done through the insertion into the courses at regular intervals of exercises which simulate accurately the work problems that employees will need to solve overseas by using the local language. In preparing these exercises, we are developing key skills such as the ability to present a U.S. position on an issue, rebut criticism and persuade a foreign official. I believe that these simulation exercises, which will be introduced during the 1981-82 school year, will represent a significant improvement in the quality of FSI language training. I also believe that training in specific job-relevant language skills is a concept that should have wide appeal to the U.S. business and academic communities.

Another important new program now underway consists of short-term language courses ("FAST" courses we call them) designed to meet the needs of employees whose overseas jobs do not require a full professional level of fluency, but whose work effectiveness and morale would be improved by a basic functional knowledge of the local language. These courses are also designed for the language needs of family members. This is a critical area, since a rewarding experience in living abroad for family members can make a profound difference in the performance of the employee. We now have language courses of 6 to 10 weeks duration in 14 of the most

for the specific work, logistical, and social situations they will meet overseas. Enrollments in these short courses have been high, and student response has been very enthusiastic. We plan to expand this program to include other languages and expect to use it to achieve over time a significant increase in the number of U.S. personnel overseas with basic foreign language facility.

In this connection, I want to mention that many of FSI's language teaching materials are available to the public through the Government Printing Office and the National Audio-Visual Center at a modest cost. We believe that these represent a significant resource which the nation's schools and colleges can draw on now in their language programs. As we develop new materials, as we are now doing with the new generation of FAST courses, we intend to assure that the results of this development work are also available to the public. FSI is also making a contribution to the academic community's language training efforts in the field of testing and rating language proficiency. The testing system for measuring speaking competence that FSI has developed is now widely used in colleges and schools.

The Foreign Service Institute's job is different from that of the schools addressed by H.R. 3231. Nevertheless, our experience provides some relevant conclusions. Our objective is teaching language as a capacity to communicate,

or field of study. We are continually working to provide this communicative capability in the most compact course possible. It seems to me that postsecondary schools in particular should provide a similar version of foreign language training if it is to be available to those preparing for a great variety of professions, with limited time available to acquire the additional skill of a competence in a foreign language. Several semesters of grammar and reading before something called "conversation" begins are not very attractive to, say, a business degree candidate who would like to augment a nearly full course "load" in this field with some competence in, say, Spanish or French.

In general we have found that quality of instruction, over the 45 languages we teach, is the most difficult problem and the one most important to maintaining high student motivation and achievement. The Institute, therefore, has devoted a great deal of its effort to the essentials of maintaining high quality of instruction. Good instructors, adequately compensated, continuing training for instructors, imaginative materials and rigid testing of student achievement as a control on individual course quality are the critical elements of our program. We have this past year, for example, significantly increased our investment in training of our instructors, and we believe the results are already apparent. Language programs in schools throughout the country

no doubt need similar attention to the maintenance of quality that will maintain student motivation and interest and bring them as quickly as possible to a capacity to communicate that makes it enjoyable and worthwhile in educational and professional terms.

I know that this aspect of responses to the problem will be part of the Subcommittee's considerations.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

ROUTING AND RECORD SHEET

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SUBJECT (Optional): DDCL Testimony Before the House Education and Labor Subcommittee on Postsecondary Education, 15 July 1981

FROM: [Redacted] EXTENSION: [Redacted] NO: OLC #81-1111/2
 Acting Legislative Counsel DATE: 16 JUN 1981

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TO (Officer designation, room number, and building)	DATE		OFFICER'S INITIALS	COMMENTS (Number each comment to show from whom to whom. Draw a line across column after each comment.)
	RECEIVED	FORWARDED		
1 DDCL				Attached for your review and concurrence are your prepared statement and talking points for your upcoming appearance before the House Education and Labor Subcommittee on Postsecondary Education on 15 July 1981, regarding the Intelligence Community need for improved foreign language capability.
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